

# Heading to a showdown on S. New

The Bethlehem Gadfly 319-327 S. New April 27, 2021

 *Latest in a series of posts on 319-327 S. New St.* 

The Historic Conservation Commission took up the 317-327 S. New St. project for the 3rd time last evening April 26, 2021.

There are two elephants in the room now:

- the out of size and scale height of the building (most recently proposed at 10 stories)
- the Mayor's vigorous siding with the project

Residents just as vigorously opposed the proposal. The Commissioners spoke against it. And the HCC again denied the proposal. Unanimously.

The proposal now goes to City Council, which does not have to respect the HCC decision. The Mayor is clearly for the project. And the developer has said that he has had favorable conversations not only with the Mayor but also with (unnamed) members of City Council.

The stage is set for a showdown at City Council.

Gadfly calls your attention especially to the way below the developer draws a red line across negotiation on the size of the project.

Classic.

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“Based upon relevant design guidelines, the current proposal for a 10-story structure is inappropriate for the immediate streetscape and, more generally, for the overall district.”

Jeffrey Long, HCC Historic Officer

“It looks like a pretty decent project, if you cut the middle 5 stories out of it.”

Commissioner Seth Cornish

“If we have buildings of this scale flanking the street, it’s just going to be a cave, it’s gonna to be a canyon.”

Commissioner Craig Evans

“The main feedback that you are going to hear tonight is that we are just having a hard time with the height.”

HCC Chair Commissioner Gary Lader

“We’ve listened to the Commission, we’ve listened to the comments, which is why we’re at the 104ft, but that’s our envelope. For this project to succeed, and I know that’s the purview of the Commission, I know that’s not what your primary focus is, but there is a real reality component to any project. And because of that we’ve come down dramatically, from 150, to 130, to 104 — that’s it, that’s as far as we can come down. And I understand scale and size is a component. I’ve listened very closely this evening to your historian. And we get it. But in order for us to proceed with this project, we’re at where we can be to make it make sense. And I don’t know that a 5-6 story building with these concepts, with this architecture is viable economically. So, again, not your purview, I get it, but there’s this overlying reality in this that has to be kept in mind. And we’re not going for the home run. The home run was 13 stories. We get it. That was the home run. And we heard very loudly and very clearly, No. 12 stories we heard, No. So now we’ve pared it down to where we can make it viable, make it worth the investment and hopefully enhance the historic district, which is the ultimate goal. . . . We’re where we are. If it’s not appropriate, we’ll be disappointed by the recommendation of a lack of certificate of appropriateness, but that’s really where we are at this point. . . . We heard you. We didn’t shoot the moon. Believe me, if we could have come in, and you’d have said 13 stories, we’d have been happy. So this isn’t we came in asking for more hoping to get something — No, no. That wasn’t the case. We didn’t do it that way. . . . We’re as low as we can go to keep these developers in the project and make it work.”

Developer attorney

“There are a number of recent developments in the area that are 5 stories and less, and they have been successful.”

Commissioner Beth Starbuck

“This is a project that the Mayor has been very public about the fact that he does support the project. . . . for a variety of reasons. . . . feet on the street . . . architectural detail . . . affordable units.”

Planning Director Darlene Heller

“It’s not really how beautiful the building is, that’s not really what the HCC is here for. I just want to support all the members of the HCC that are upholding what the HCC is here for, that is, to uphold the integrity of South Bethlehem.”

Resident Rachel Leon

“I’m saddened that the Mayor has weighed in based on things that violate the historic district guidelines.”

Resident Kim Carrell-Smith

“When people purchase property . . . there should be some form they have to sign that demonstrates that they’ve read the guidelines.”

Resident Breena Holland.

“I’m a law-abiding citizen who follows the regulations as they’re printed.”

Resident Al Wurth

The HCC voted down the proposal 6-0.

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The Gadfly has loaded a great deal of information into this post because the HCC meetings are irregularly recorded and archived on the City web site, and we may want to refer back to this discussion when this “case” moves on to City Council.

ref: **Another developer thinking big . . . er, tall**

ref: **The HCC discusses the proposal for 319-327 S. New**

ref: **“The current proposal for a 12-story structure is inappropriate”**

ref: **“What we have in front of us is going to be a big stretch for us”**

ref: **“Going to 5-6 stories definitely wouldn’t work”**

ref: **Southside developer blows some smoke**

ref: **The developer plays hard ball**

ref: **Establishing Community-Centered Principles for Responsible Southside Development**

ref: **Testing the principles for responsible development on the S. New St. project, part 1**

ref: **Testing the principles for responsible development on the S, New St. project, part 2**

ref: **The Mayor enters Southside historic district proceedings**

ref: **S. New St. developer offers affordable housing while maintaining height**

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Historic Officer Jeffrey Long's summary of HCC deliberations at the meetings in January and February 2021:

Commissioner Seth Cornish: "We've been tasked as a historic commission to try to keep the rhythms and the walkability and the reason people like to come to downtown, we've been tasked to keep that. Historic districts aren't just created to have fun."

Commissioner Craig Evans: "While we are a part of the City and concerned about the improvement and advancement that our City can enjoy through development, it is our charge to be responsible for how it fits in to an established historic district. . . . If we keep flying at these things with something that doesn't fit, we have a significant challenge."

Commissioner Beth Starbuck; "Since they are given all this free rental space, they could modify the height of the building to plumb with the Southside district."

Resident Rachel Leon: "I believe the residents of South Bethlehem have been very clear about how they feel about these structures 10 or 12 stories high."

Resident Kim Carrell-Smith: "The Mayor's reasoning about affordable housing is problematic in many respects. . . . It's a bad argument to be set up, that it has to be one thing or the other."

Resident Brena Holland: "This whole business of them coming to buy property and then come in as though it's someone else's responsibility to

let them build, would lead people to think that they didn't actually read those guidelines."

Resident Al Wurth: "The building will loom over the Greenway in a way that will have enormous impact."

**The Bethlehem Gadfly**